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CIA Operations Center

Subject Middle East

Date March 16, 1978

Analyst/SDO

Distribution

White House Spot Report

OC-WHSR-78-052

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TO: IMMEDIATE WHITE HOUSE//SITUATION ROOM. 4

ITEM NO: 3 DATE: 16 MARCH 1978

SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST: THE POLITICAL FALLOUT OF THE ISREALI INCURSION

THE INCURSION HAS PREDICTABLY WON THE ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT OF THE ISRAELI PUBLIC AND PRESS. A MOOD APPROACHING WAR FEVER HAD DEVELOPED IN ISRAEL PRIOR TO THE OPERATION AND HAS BEEN FOLLOWED BY A CATHARTIC SENSE OF RELIEF AND PRIDE. THE OPPOSITION LABOR PARTY HAS RALLIED FIRMLY BEHIND THE GOVERNMENT. FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON, A PROMINENT LABOR PARTY LEADER, HAS ENDORSED THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO KEEP FORCES IN SOUTHERN LEBANON UNTIL AN AGREEMENT IS WORKED OUT THAT BARS THE RETURN OF THE PALESTINIAN GUERRILLAS.

THE GOVERNMENT STILL FACES QUESTIONS OVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE TERRORIST RAID. RUMORS HAVE ALREADY APPEARED IN THE ISRAELI PRESS SUGGESTING THAT THERE WAS A SECURITY LAPSE.

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THE EVENTS OF THE PAST WEEK, HOWEVER, HAVE AT LEAST TEMPORARILY REVERSED THE EROSION IN PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S POPULAR SUPPORT. HE IS BEING CREDITED WITH TAKING STRONG, DECISIVE ACTION. Y

BEGIN IS ALMOST CERTAIN TO TRY TO TURN THIS TO HIS ADVANTAGE DURING HIS TALKS NEXT WEEK IN WASHINGTON WITH SENIOR US OFFICIALS. SECURE AT HOME AND BANKING ON AN UPSWELLING IN SYMPATHY FOR ISRAEL IN THE US, BEGIN PROBABLY WILL TRY TO BUILD A STRONG PUBLIC CASE ON SECURITY GROUNDS FOR HIS DIFFERENCES WITH THE US OVER THE SETTLEMENTS, QUESTIONS AND UN RESOLUTION 242. Y

THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF A BUFFER ZONE IN SOUTH LEBANON PLACES SYRIA PRESIDENT ASAD IN A SERIOUS PREDICAMENT. ASAD HAS INVESTED MUCH OF HIS PRESTIGE IN RECENT YEARS IN PROJECTING SYRIA AS THE PROTECTOR OF THE PALESTINIANS AS WELL AS THE DEFENDER OF LEBANON. SYRIA'S FAILURE TO ACT AGAINST THE ISRAELI ATTACK HAS CALLED INTO QUESTION BOTH CLAIMS. Y

THE IRAQI AND EGYPTIAN PRESS HAS ALREADY TAUNTED ASAD FOR

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STANDING BY IDLY. SYRIA WILL TRY TO FEND OFF SUCH CHARGES BY ACCUSING EGYPT OF ACQUIESCING IN ISRAEL'S OCCUPATION OF SOUTH LEBANON BUT THE PRESSURE WILL MOUNT ON ASAD TO DO SOMETHING. SYRIA'S PUBLIC PROMISE TO PROVIDE AIR COVER FOR LEBANON REFLECTS ASAD'S RECOGNITION OF THE NEED TO DEMONSTRATE SYRIAN RESOLVE. ASAD WILL PROBABLY ENCOURAGE THE PALESTINIANS, ESPECIALLY SYRIAN CONTROLLED SAIQA FORCES, TO HOLD THEIR POSITIONS BETWEEN THE SYRIAN FORCES IN CENTRAL LEBANON AND THE ISRAELIS. Y

SO FAR, [redacted] ASAD WANTS TO AVOID A DIRECT MILITARY CONFRONTATION WITH ISRAEL. SYRIAN FORCES IN LEBANON HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO FIRE ONLY IN SELF DEFENSE, AND SYRIAN AIRCRAFT HAVE AVOIDED ENTERING LEBANESE AIRSPACE. Y

SYRIA'S DEMARCHE TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL REFLECTS ASAD'S DESIRE TO SOLIDIFY INTERNATIONAL OPPOSITION TO AN ISRAELI-OCCUPIED BUFFER ZONE. THE SYRIANS ARE AWARE THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY IS COMPLETELY INCAPABLE OF ASSUMING A SECURITY ROLE IN THE SOUTH AND THAT THE ISRAELIS WILL NOT WITHDRAW UNLESS THE PALESTINIANS ARE KEPT AWAY FROM THE BORDER. Y

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IN THE PAST THE SYRIANS HAVE RESISTED EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A UN PEACEKEEPING FORCE IN SOUTH LEBANON, BELIEVING THAT THIS WOULD INFRINGE ON THEIR PREEMINENT POSITION IN LEBANON. ENDORSING SUCH A FORCE MIGHT ALSO HAVE PROMPTED CHARGES THAT SYRIA ABANDONED THE PALESTINIANS' LAST "FRONT" AGAINST ISRAEL. NONETHELESS ASAD WOULD PROBABLY NOW FIND A UN FORCE MORE PALATABLE THAN A CONTINUED ISRAELI PRESENCE. WITHOUT PUBLICLY ENDORSING SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT HE MAY TACITLY ENCOURAGE THE LEBANESE TO PURSUE IT. Y

EGYPT PRESIDENT SADAT YESTERDAY JOINED OTHER ARAB LEADERS IN CONDEMNING ISRAELI'S ATTACK INTO LEBANON. HE EMPHASIZED THAT ISRAEL'S SECURITY GOALS CAN BE MET ONLY BY SOLVING THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM, NOT BY FORCE OF ARMS. SADAT VOWED TO CONTINUE HIS SEARCH FOR PEACE. Y

OTHER EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS AND THE MEDIA YESTERDAY SHARPLY CRITICIZED ISRAEL'S "GENOCIDE" IN SOUTH LEBANON AND THE SCALE OF ITS REPRISAL. ISRAEL, NEVERTHELESS, IS STILL TREATED AS A POTENTIAL PARTNER IN SHAPING PEACE. Y

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ISRAEL'S RAID WAS USED AS AN OCCASION TO ATTACK THE USSR AND SYRIA WHICH WERE RIDUCULED FOR THE CRAVEN REACTION. THE US RECEIVED LITTLE ATTENTION PENDING A US OFFICIAL STATEMENT. EGYPT CLEARLY EXPECTS THE US TO CONDEMN THE ISRAELI ACTION AND TO LEAD DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO SECURE ISRAEL'S WITHDRAWL FROM LEBANON. PREPARED BY:

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

White House Spot Report concerning the political fallout resulting from Israel's incursion into Lebanon. White House, 16 Mar. 1978. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, link.gale.com/apps/doc/BKGFUZ410766919/USDD?u=omni&sid=bookmark-USDD&pg=3. Accessed 30 Dec. 2024.